



Jet Ski tragedy haunts teen pal

By KATI CORNELL

A Brooklyn teen who was cleared of criminal charges after killing a friend in a Jet Ski crash in Mill Basin said the tragedy continues to haunt him three years later.

In his first interview since his arrest, Aristotle Plagianakos said he was so traumatized by the death of 17-year-old Paul Zaccaria on June 30, 2006, that he immediately dropped out of high school and swore off riding a Jet Ski.

"It changed me. I wasn't myself. I was very depressed and miserable," said Plagianakos, 19, who was acquitted of manslaughter in Brooklyn Supreme Court last week after defense lawyer Joseph Tacopina introduced evidence suggesting the victim was to blame.

Recounting the fateful moments before the crash, Plagianakos said Zaccaria's Jet Ski came "out of nowhere."

"His head was turned the other way. I stood up fast and screamed his name," Plagianakos said. "I let go of the gas. That was the only thing I could have done ... and pray to miss him. It didn't happen that way.

"I was very worried for my friend," said Plagianakos, who watched as Zaccaria was launched from his Jet Ski and disappeared



Paul Martinika

HORROR: Aristotle Plagianakos (above) was acquitted in the Jet Ski death of Paul Zaccaria (right).

underwater. "I was circling around ... I thought his body would come up."

Seeing no sign of Zaccaria, Plagianakos sped home to call 911 and returned with help.

Zaccaria died on the spot, although it took a month to find his body.

"I give all my love to his family and friends," said Plagianakos, who denies prosecutors' claims that he callously fled the scene.

"In my head, I did nothing wrong. I did everything I possible could. I was 16 years old. I think I handled it well," said Plagianakos.

He was the first person



in the city to be charged with manslaughter for a marine accident and could have faced 15 years behind bars if convicted.

"It's been three years of my life. I'm very happy that it's over," Plagianakos said of the criminal case.

He now plans to return to school and earn his GED.

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